COMMUNICATION SATELLITE

OUTPUT DEVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Because of the crucial emphasis on reliability and efficiency for satellite-borne applications, it was deemed desirable to review the entire field of power amplification at communication satellite frequencies. With the rapid improvement in solid-state devices, there is now a need for such reviews (including a quantitative comparison of the various categories of solid-state and vacuum tube output devices for space vehicles) on a periodic basis.

A COMMUNICATION SATELLITE operating at microwave frequencies is not constrained to the use of a vacuum tube for generating an output signal. Various semi-conductor devices are also available and, though they are subject to certain limitations, they offer advantages which make their use attractive in some applications. Both semi-conductors and vacuum tubes have been subjected to intensive development for use in the unique environment of space-craft. As a result, semiconductors

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are available with improved resistance to damage by charged particle flux, [illegible] whose performance is less influenced by temperature variation. Similarly, extremely light weight vacuum tubes have been developed which provide high-efficiency heat transfer without fluid flow. In general, for communication satellite operations, either type of device must have a long operating life and high reliability at the lowest possible cost in weight and prime power. The relative ability of semiconductor devices, such as tunnel diodes, transistors, and varactor diodes and vacuum tube amplifiers such as triodes, klystrons, amplitrons and TWTs to generate signal power efficiently at frequencies of 1 to 10 kMc and power levels of 0.1 to 100 watts is the primary concern of this paper.

II. SEMICONDUCTORS

Semiconductor devices currently considered for output stages are the tunnel diode, the transistor and the varactor. Tunnel diodes are presently restricted to power outputs below 100 milliwatts. In fact, most tunnel diode amplifiers and oscillators in the 1 to 10 kMc range have power outputs in the 0.01 mw to 2 mw range. Because of their low power, tunnel diodes are not useful as output stages for communication satellites when one or a few diodes are used, since they provide too low an information rate for the ground terminal investment.[1] To overcome this limitation, techniques for using these devices as negative resistance terminations in large arrays[2,3] have been proposed, but such schemes are dependent on the development of suitable techniques for erecting and pointing arrays. However, the low incident signal levels at the tunnel diode result in essentially linear operation so that except for a more restricted bandwidth, large arrays of tunnel diodes would be comparable to large passive reflectors.

Although present transistors are able to provide about 1 watt at 1000 Mc in laboratory units,[4,5,6] only about 1 to 10 mw are available now at 4000 Mc. Transistors have just begun challenging vacuum tubes as medium-power generators (5 to 25 watts) in the 100 to 500 Mc range.[7] It will be years before this range is extended upward significantly, because of the difficulties of fabricating the higher-frequency power transistor. Thus the transistor is not a sufficiently high-power output device at about 4 kMc for use now as the output stage of an active communication satellite.

Solid-state medium-power generation today above 1 kMc utilizes varactor diodes. One method uses varactors as frequency multipliers [8,9,10] as shown in Figs. 1a through 1c. At the present, doubler circuits using single diodes can yield about 13 watts output at 1000 Mc output and 2.7 watts at 5000 Mc.[11] A typical overall efficiency for a multiplier chain starting from a low-level signal is about 10 per cent for a 2.5 kMc output and 5 per cent for a 5 kMc output, but the state of the art is rapidly improving. In the laboratory, 12 per cent efficiency at 2.5 kMc has been achieved and 15 per cent can be achieved by selecting devices. At 4 kMc, recently marketed solid state devices such as those used in the block diagrams of Figs. 1a and 1b give overall efficiencies of 8 per cent and 10 per cent. Using devices which will be available within a year, 15 per cent overall efficiency should be achievable. Figure 1c shows one method by which such improvement may be obtained. A similar gain in efficiency could be realized through greater improvements in diode efficiency or in higher-frequency transistors.

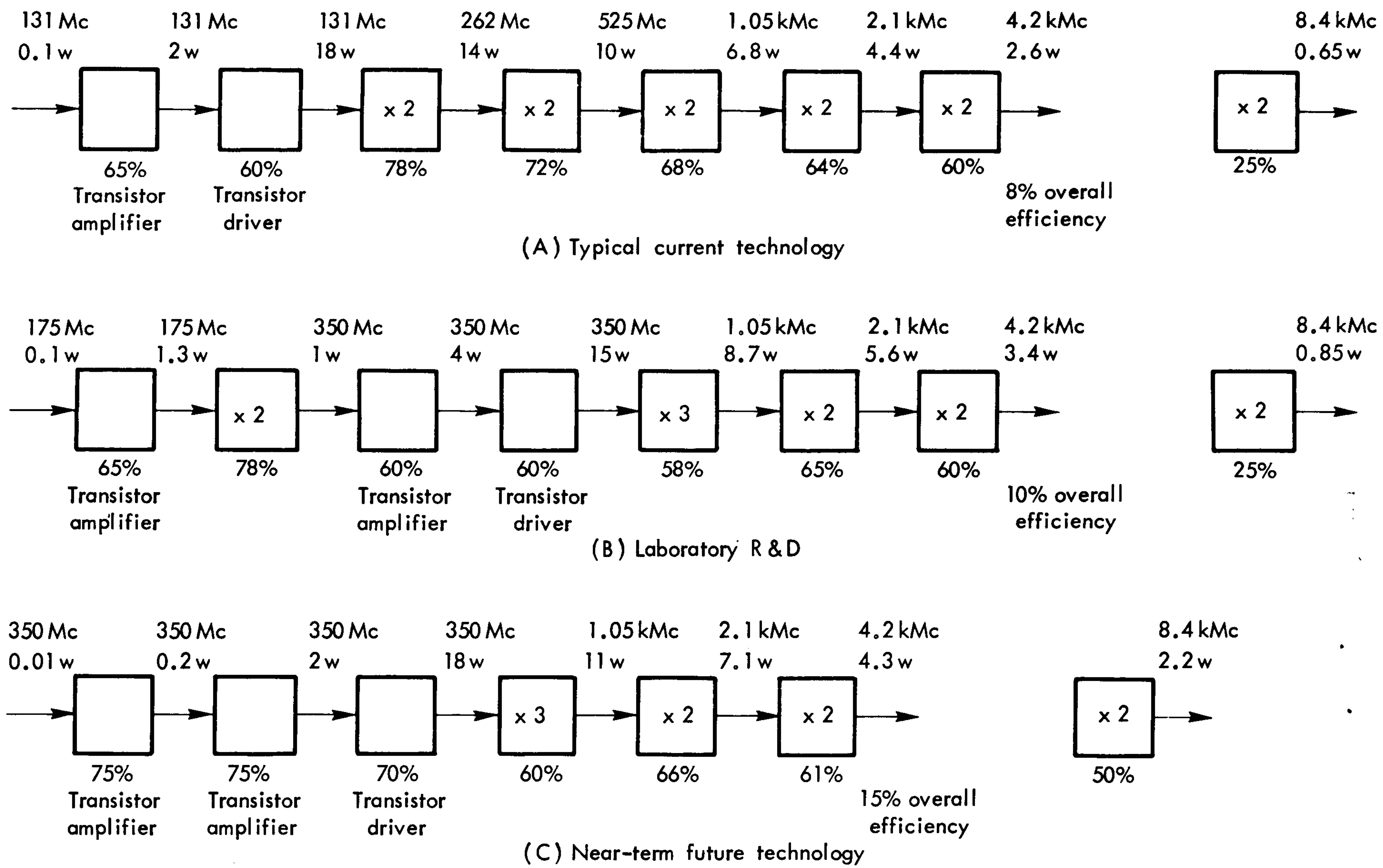

Fig. 1—Solid state multiplier chains

Another approach to solid state varactor power generation is shown in the circuit of Fig. 2--a parametric upconverter in which the pump power is generated in a narrow-band varactor multiplier chain.(8,12,13) By virtue of the narrow bandwidth of the transistor amplifier, driver, and multiplier, the pump chain offers higher efficiency than can be obtained in the broader-bandwidth circuits shown in Figs. 1a through 1c. The increased efficiency of the chain (primarily due to the transistor circuits) cannot, however, fully offset the power loss of the upconverter from pump to output frequency. Typical converter efficiencies,(12,13) i.e., output power/pump power, are about 50 per cent for frequencies from 2 to 8 kMc. Thus there is a net loss of efficiency compared to the multiplier circuit; but there is an important difference in the characteristics of the two in that the multiplier chain multiplies (i.e., expands) the signal bandwidth as well as its center frequency, while the upconverter produces a pure frequency translation. A high intermediate frequency (200 Mc or more) and filtering are desirable to facilitate rejection of the carrier and lower sideband, as well as other frequency components present in the upconverter pump signal. Although upconverter bandwidths have been limited to 0.1 to 0.2 per cent based on output frequency, 1 to 2 per cent has recently been demonstrated, without sacrificing efficiency.

In order to obtain the power levels and efficiencies cited in Fig. 1, a rather sophisticated technology has evolved. The proliferation of companies engaged in research and development on solid-state multipliers, and the diversity of their applications, has resulted in a dynamic technology with widely disparate achievements. The comments

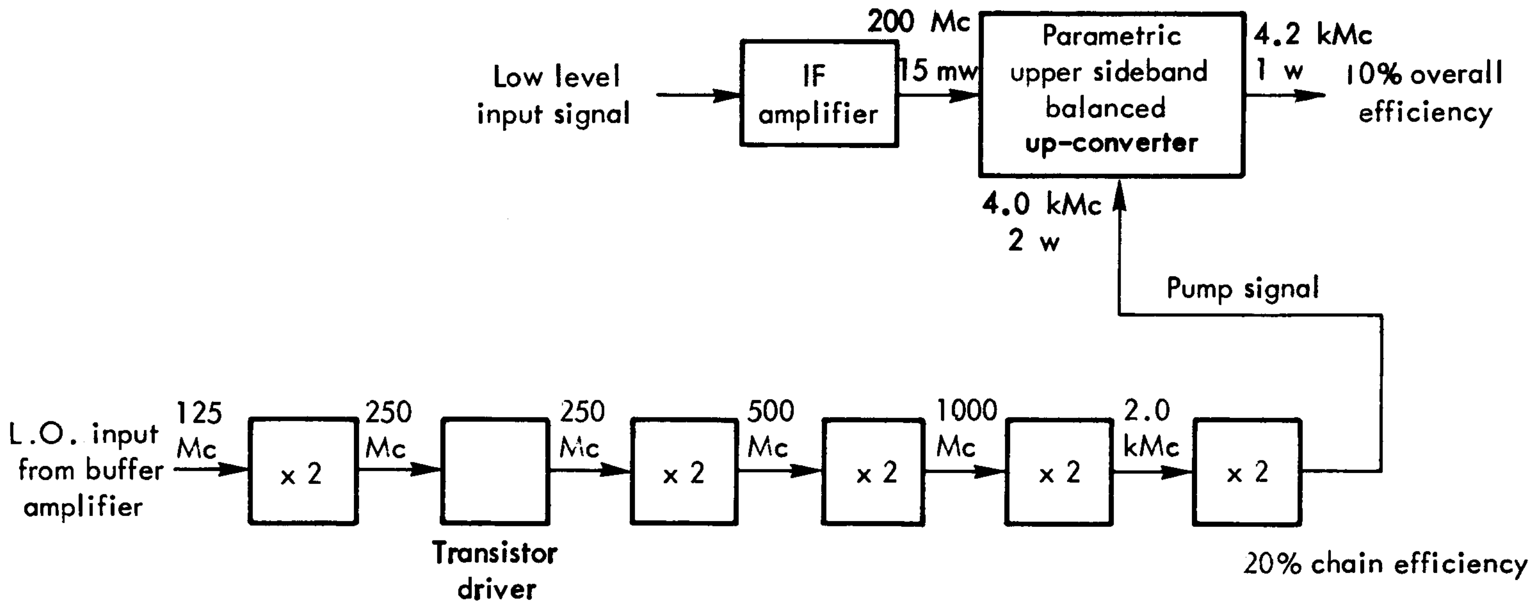

Fig. 2—Solid state up-converter circuit

which follow attempt to reflect general experience in this area, but are oriented toward space applications rather than competitive volume production.

To handle the drive powers or to obtain the efficiencies shown in Fig. 1, it is sometimes necessary to parallel varactors. This can be done in the conventional manner, or in a balanced microwave configuration with little loss in efficiency but with a doubling of the allowable power level. Operating at a lower power level per diode permits higher efficiencies to be obtained, as is evident from Figs. 3 and 4. The data in these figures are based on circuit performance at room temperature for a single stage as furnished by one manufacturer,(11) but they are fairly typical. Since the performance of varactor circuits as calculated from the diode parameters has not correlated well with measurements, manufacturers have recently begun to characterize the devices by means of the circuit parameters of frequency and power level. It may be noted from Figs. 3 and 4 that varactor multiplier efficiency is much more sensitive to the operating frequency than to the power level. A change in frequency by a factor of only between 2 and 3 can produce the same effect as a variation of 40 to 50 times in power level.

To obtain optimum efficiency, the diode must be selected in each stage to suit the drive level.(14) For diodes emphasizing charge storage effects(10,15) this restriction becomes less important. At the higher frequencies, breakdown voltage and thus allowable drive power becomes limited if the varactor is to have high Q (and thus high efficiency). Even optimally selected diodes can handle less power and are less efficient at the higher frequencies, as is evident

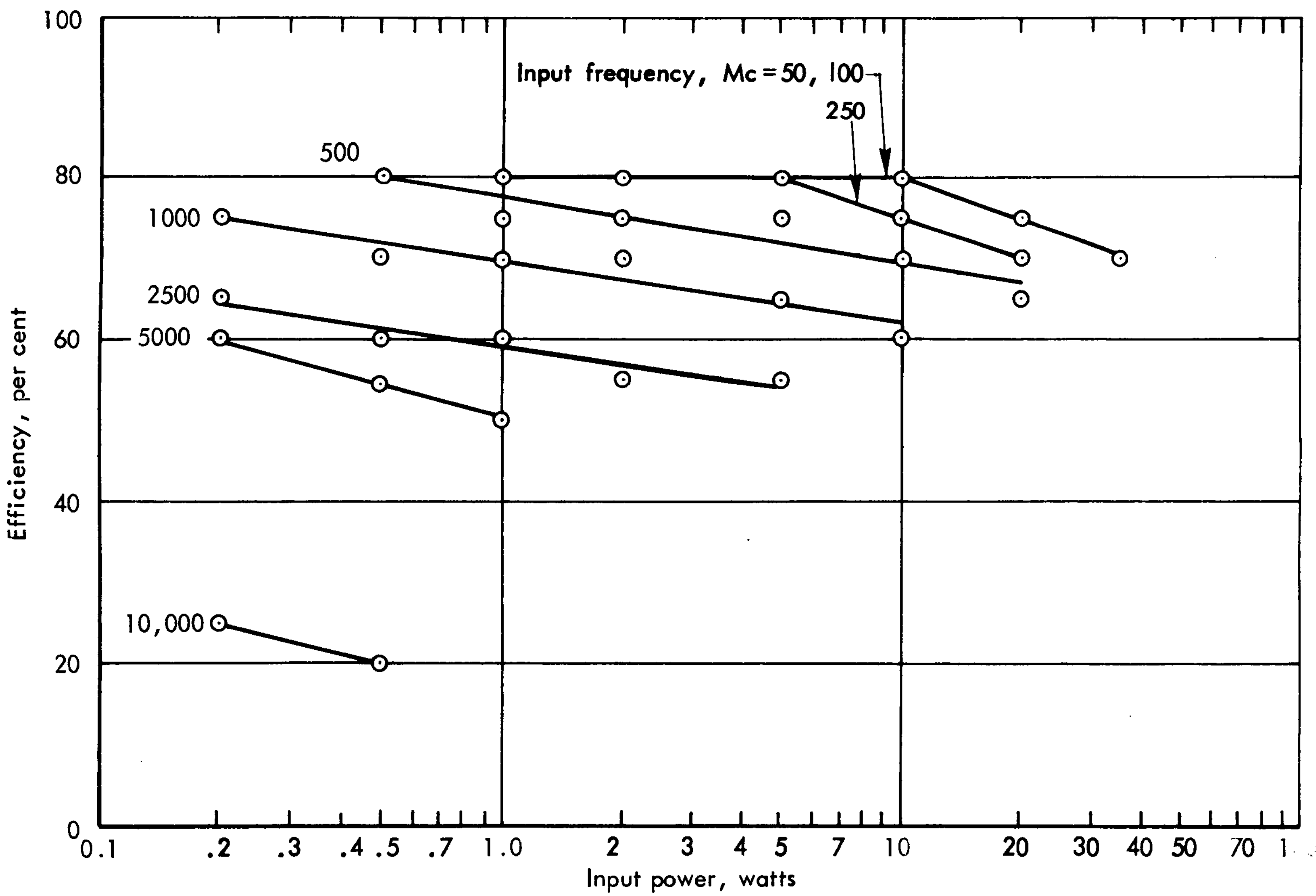

Fig. 3—Single stage doubler efficiency

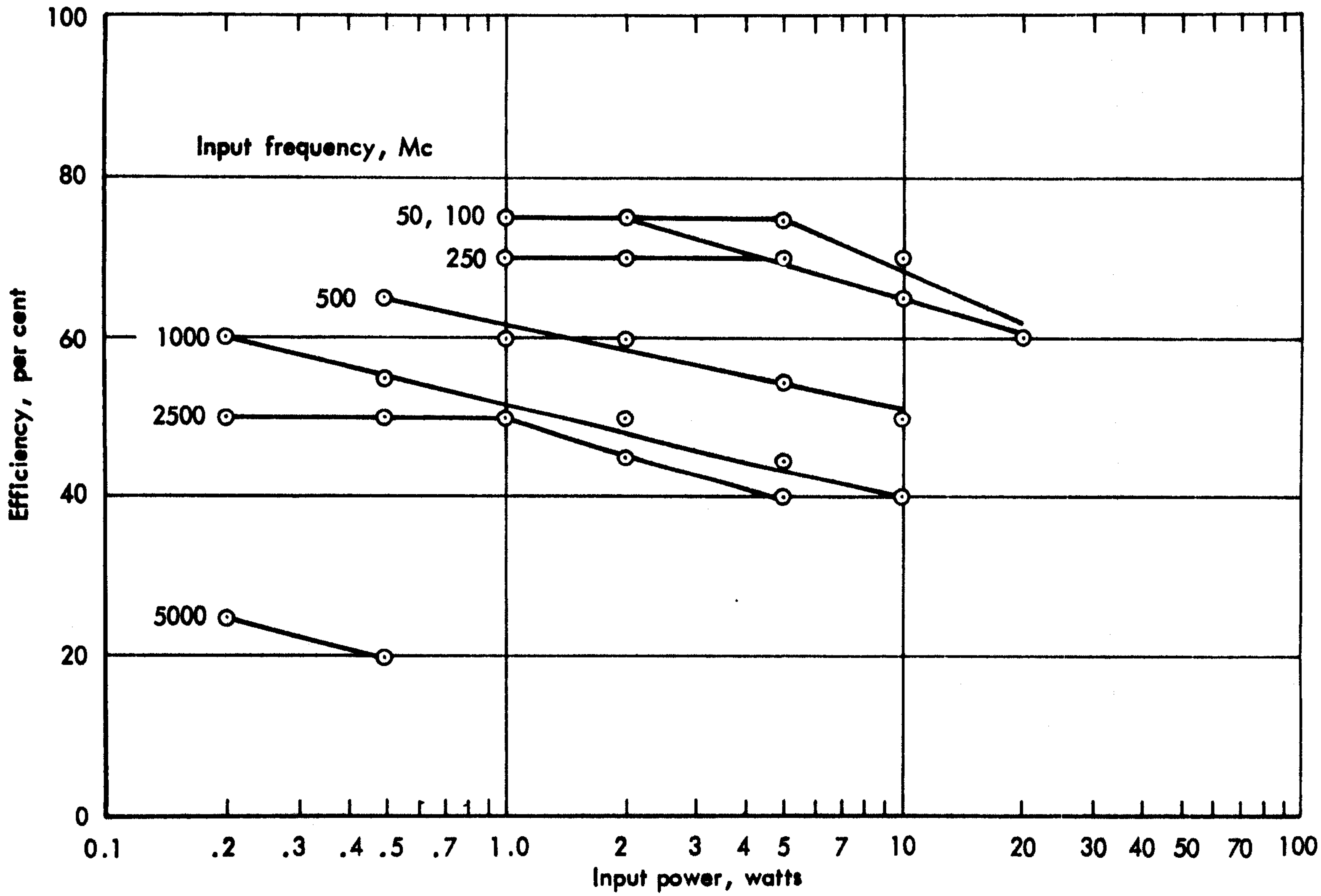

Fig. 4—Single stage tripler efficiency

in Figs. 3 and 4. For still higher power levels, paralleling numbers of diodes is being studied. Paralleling complete multiplier chains is possible, but results in a 1 to 2 db loss at present relative to the sum of the powers.[16] Paralleling transistors in the varactor chain driver is also possible but requires careful matching of DC and RF characteristics, and results in a loss of some gain and efficiency. Typical 3-db bandwidths of the circuits in Figs. 1a through 1c are 1 to 5 per cent. Larger bandwidths are obtainable by trading efficiency, particularly in the transistor stages.

Doubler chains are in general preferable to chains using triplers where bandwidth is important. As far as efficiency is concerned, however, the lower efficiency of the tripler is offset by the fewer number of stages required, assuming the terminal frequencies are about the same. Thus Fig. 5 shows that for 2 watts input, the power at 400 Mc and again at 3200-3600 Mc is about the same, using typical varactor efficiencies from Figs. 3 and 4. The point is that the efficiencies arrived at in Figs. 1b and 1c are not due to any inherent advantage of triplers. The choice between doublers and triplers is made on the basis of available high-efficiency transistors providing moderate gains, and by consideration of the terminal frequency. Cost of diodes and reliability favor the tripler; ease of design and tuning plus greater overall bandwidth favor the doubler.

The preceding figures are for operation at +20°C. As the ambient temperature is raised, efficiency falls.[14] Assuming that the change in diode junction capacitance is compensated for, the diode stages still show a loss with temperature due to the series resistance. Assuming

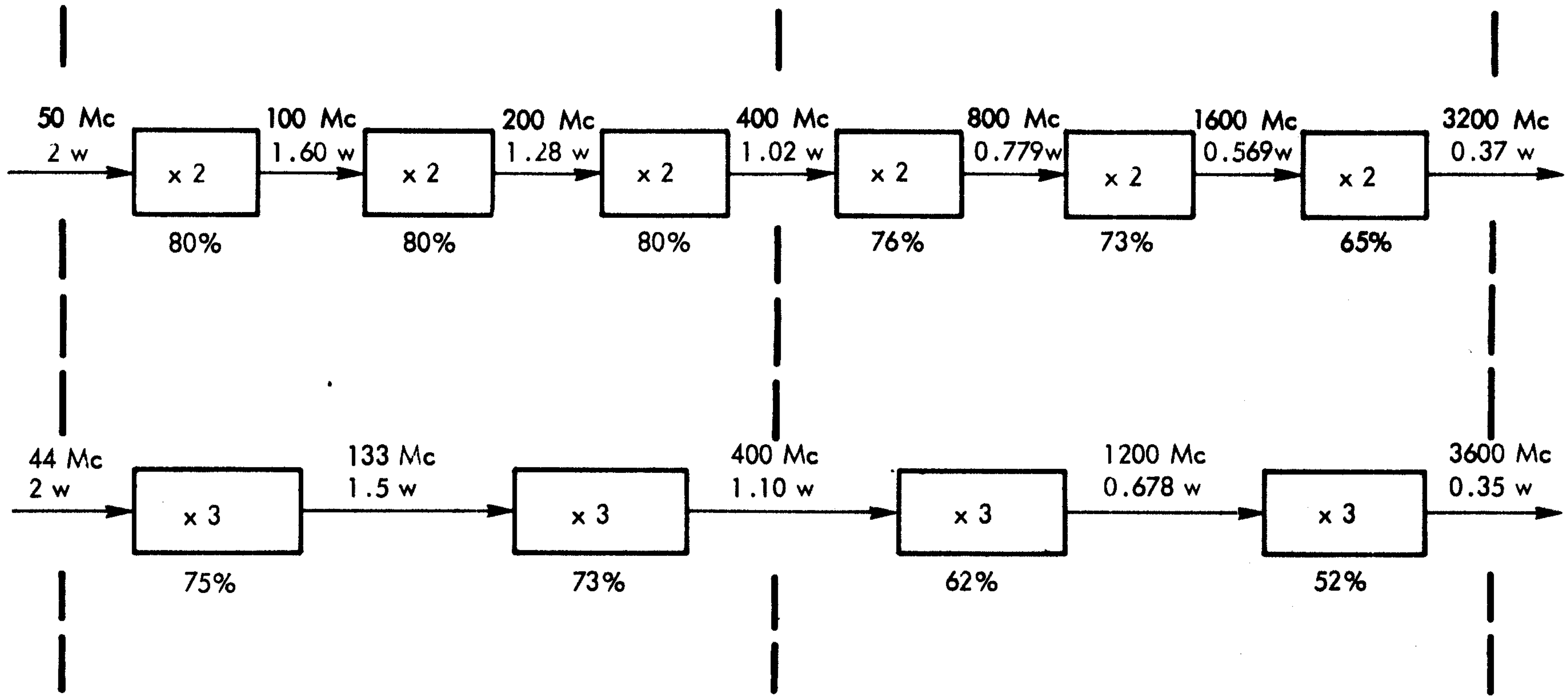

Fig. 5—A comparison of doubler and tripler varactor multiplier efficiencies

that the transistors have adequate cooling to prevent thermal instability, a typical correction factor for the overall chain efficiencies of Fig. 1 would be about .75 over the range from $+20^{\circ}C$ to $+80^{\circ}C$.

For present transistor and varactor technology, to obtain maximum power requires driving at 50 to 100 Mc and multiplying thereafter;[15] for maximum overall efficiency, however, driving should be at 350 to 500 Mc. In order to realize maximum overall efficiency, the transistors may require a higher voltage than the typical 28-volt supply, e.g., 40 volts. Where such a regulated supply is available the solid state circuitry can operate directly off the supply, thus eliminating the need for the voltage conversion equipment associated with vacuum tubes.

Using the three transistor drive levels of Fig. 1c and various combinations of doublers and triplers (from four doublers through three triplers), a set of twelve block diagrams were prepared reflecting the near-future technology of Fig. 1c. The overall driver-multiplier efficiencies of these twelve combinations are plotted in Fig. 6 as a function of output power level, and cross-plotted in Fig. 7 to emphasize the frequency dependence of efficiency.

At present the higher-performance solid-state devices are in only limited production, and short-term performance characteristics are not always reproducible. Few data are available on their long-term performance. Since the space environment will present further difficulties due to charged-particle flux and temperature and drive level variations, it should not be assumed that the high reliability normally associated with solid-state circuitry will invariably be achieved with such devices in space communication applications.

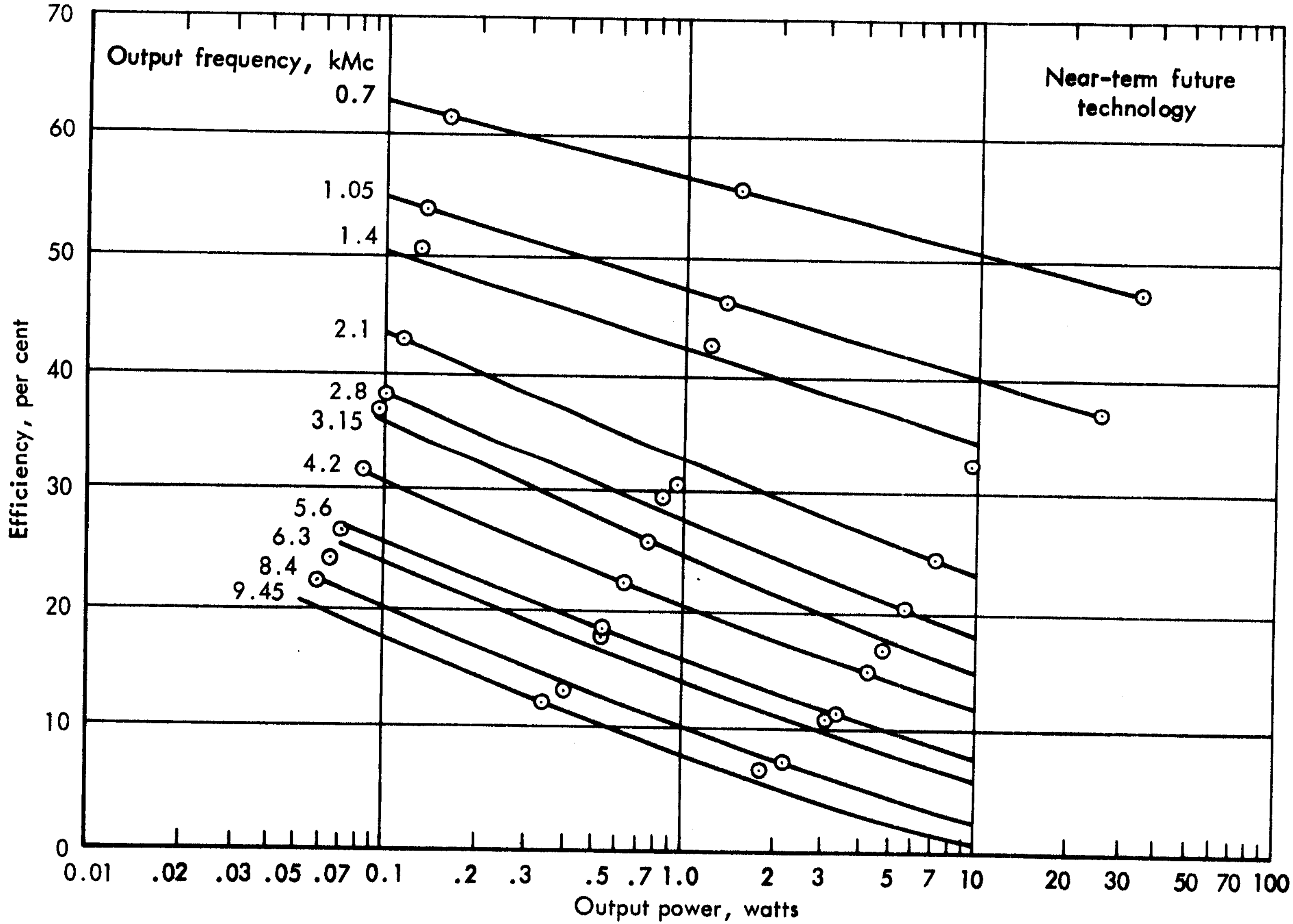

Fig. 6—Overall efficiency of transistor amplifier, driver, and varactor multiplier chain

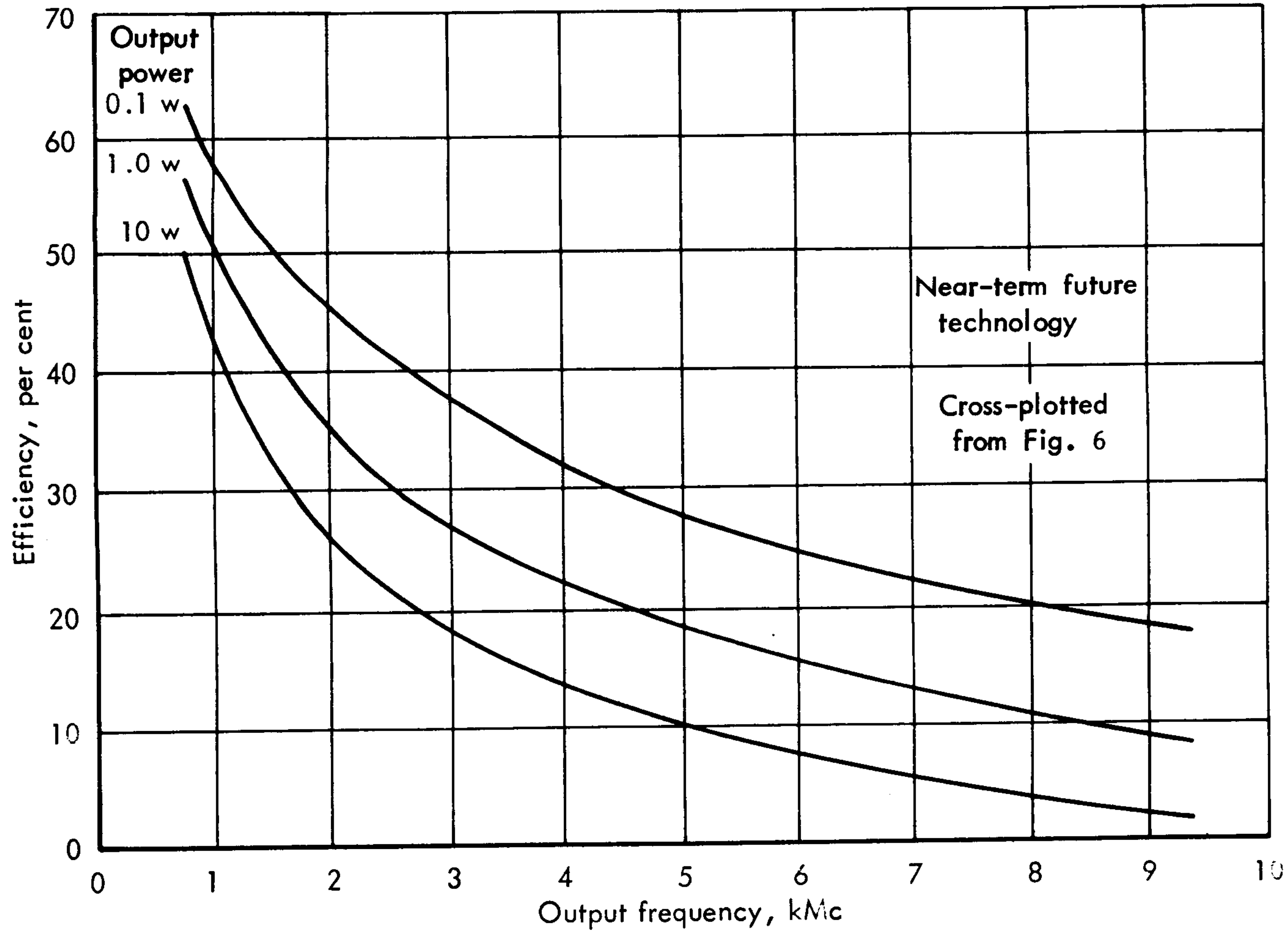

Fig. 7—Overall efficiency of transistor amplifier, driver, and varactor multiplier chain

III. VACUUM TUBES

The four primary types of vacuum tube amplifiers considered for communications use in space vehicles are triodes,[17,18] klystrons,[19,20] amplitrons[21,22] and TWTs.[23,24,25,26,27]

Triodes

Appreciable power is available from triodes at 1 kMc[28] in cavity amplifiers; but above this, power output, gain and efficiency fall rapidly with frequency. Furthermore, at higher frequencies, long life and high efficiency become incompatible.

The JPL Ranger transponders at L-band use an improved version of the ML 6771, i.e., the ML 546 in a pair of cascaded triode cavity-amplifiers. A solid-state driver delivers 8 mw at 960 Mc to the first triode, which has an efficiency of 6 per cent. The second triode has a 3-watt output and an efficiency of 38 per cent, so that the two-stage overall efficiency is 25 per cent at 960 Mc. Commercially available triode amplifiers at 2 kMc offer 10 to 20 watts output at 7 db gain, roughly .7 per cent bandwidth, but have high heater powers (e.g., 7 watts). Although overall efficiencies (including heater power) of 15 to 20 per cent for a several-stage triode amplifier are possible at the 10 to 20 watt level,[7] this drops to 10 per cent at the 1-to-2 watt level; using reliable tubes operated to obtain a 25,000 to 50,000 hr life[17,18] results in roughly half these efficiencies, assuming one starts with a few milliwatt drive signal. About the best that is possible without derating for extremely long life is exhibited by the Mariner C transponder.

The Mariner C plans to use the Siemen's RH7C,[29] or an improved version (the V251) in the 2200-2300 Mc telemetry band.[30] The standard commercial version is rated for 4 watts at 4 kMc in a cw oscillator at 14 per cent efficiency (4.8 watts of heater power and 28.8 watts of plate power) but exhibits parameter changes after 1000 hr and has a typical life of 2000 hr. The 6000 to 8000 hr life desired for the Mariner application is not obtainable in present tubes at the 10-watt level at 2 kMc. JPL is funding the development of an improved tube (the V251) at Siemen's, having an objective of 1 db degradation in 10,000 hr. Although the original tube was designed to permit operation up to 6 kMc, this will no longer be possible, as the internal spacings are being increased and the emission density lowered to obtain more reliable operation at 2 kMc. Since the equipment is designed to operate from -10° to $+75^{\circ}$C, the output cavity must be temperature-compensated; stabilization is accomplished by a tuning slug which is hydraulically actuated by the fluid in a bellows. At the 8 to 10-watt level the 2295 Mc V251 cavity amplifier has a gain of 13 db, a heater power of 4.0 watts, and a plate efficiency greater than 27 per cent (600 volts, 50 ma) for an overall efficiency of 23 to 33 per cent. The 3-db bandwidth is 7 Mc or .3 per cent.

Negative grid tubes have been used at higher frequencies than 2 kMc with long life. Using the WE416B[31] (designed for the TD-2 overland microwave link) for example, a 100 Mc bandwidth is achievable at 4000 Mc (2.5 per cent) with extremely long life. The output power level is 50 mw at 9 db gain, or 500 mw at 5 db gain; the plate efficiency is less than 10 per cent, and the overall efficiency of the single stage is less than 5 per cent.

Klystrons

Efficient, reliable, high-frequency operation has long been a characteristic of power klystrons, and, in the range of 1 to 10 kMc, tubes are readily available at power levels from 1 kw to 100 kw cw. Although high-power cw klystrons have typical beam efficiencies in the 30 to 45 per cent range (without collector depression) medium-power klystron amplifiers are rather poor in this regard because they have concentrated on gain, noise figure, and stability. Typical efficiencies of electrostatically focused klystrons have been about 5 to 10 per cent, e.g., Varian's VA-832, although more efficient versions are being developed. ESF klystrons are light in weight (2 lb or less since they eliminate the conventional heavy permanent magnet), narrowband (and thus require no output filtering), relatively insensitive to load VSWR (possibly eliminating an output isolator), and small (3¼" dia. x 4½" high at S-band for a 20-watt tube). They are also relatively less sensitive to power supply ripple or other supply voltage fluctuations than are synchronous beam devices, and may have automatic protection against positive ion bombardment of the cathode due to the ion trapping by the focusing potential gradients.

Recently in the L3910 tube,[19,20] being developed for the Apollo program, an overall efficiency of 29 per cent has been demonstrated at the 20-watt level without depressed collector operation. This is a higher efficiency than was considered possible a few years ago from an electrostatically focused klystron. Saturated gains are typically 15 to 30 db and bandwidths are .1 to .3 per cent; high gain in low-power klystrons has always been associated with narrow bandwidth.

Moderately high-power klystron tubes have demonstrated lifetimes of 5000 hr, and some tubes have exceeded 15,000 hr of operation. With proper derating of the cathode emission density and ion trapping, a lifetime of 50,000 hr or more in low-power tubes should be readily achievable since the gun design is similar to that of TWTs of the same power level. Since the Litton ESF configuration differs significantly from conventional klystron design, its capability for long life operation cannot be taken for granted; it remains to be demonstrated.

Amplitrons

A light-weight amplitron (a crossed-field continuous cathode reentrant beam backward-wave amplifier) for space applications was thought to be impossible some years ago because of the large magnet weight considered essential for even a low-power tube. Since then a 20 to 25-watt, 2-lb tube (including magnet) has been developed[21,22] which has an overall efficiency of 40 to 55 per cent while offering in addition a moderately good gain, 17 db, instead of the 8 to 10 db characteristic of high-power amplitrons. Other tubes have been built and operated at from 10 to 100 watts for up to 1500 hr. Since high-power pulsed magnetron life has been raised in recent years from a typical figure of 50 hr to values as high as 1000 to 5000 hr, one might expect a low-power cw tube to perform at least as well. If so, the low-power amplitron would possess a reasonable life for some space applications. It is unfortunate that no life data are available on recently fabricated tubes to indicate if the low-power amplitron is in the 5000 hr life class.

To protect the driver stage from reflected output power (the backward insertion loss is less than 1 db) as well as from reverse-directed power generated within the amplitron, a circulator or isolator is desirable at the input to the tube. The tube is not stable under short-circuit conditions nor at low RF drive levels, but would not be damaged under these conditions. Like all backward-wave mode tubes, the amplitron is voltage-tunable and thus sensitive to power supply voltage; in addition, a constant current regulator is required to stabilize the output power level. Heater power must be varied from start to operation; it varies from tube to tube. To avoid shortening cathode life, a feedback loop must regulate cathode temperature. Logic circuitry is required to ensure proper mode acquisition, i.e., to recycle the anode output voltage automatically if drive power is momentarily lost.

The space amplitron has been under development for several years, but the funding has so far been at too low a level to supply any answer to the life question, or to provide a mechanical package capable of meeting the launch environment, or to produce electrically reliable reproducible tubes.

Traveling Wave Tubes

With the demonstration of 30,000 hr life on a dozen 5-watt M1789 prototype TWTs for the Bell System's TH link (the production version is the WE444A) and the use of M1958 TWTs in a missile guidance system,[32] by late 1959 the TWT emerged as the best contender for communication satellites. NASA programs in communication satellites immediately took cognizance of their potential for reliable, efficient power generation, resulting in TWTs for Telstar, M4041;[23,32]

Relay, A-1245;[27,33] Syncom, 314H;[24,34] with a backup TWT for the latter, WJ-237.[35] TWT developments for Advent, WJ-231;[36] Surveyor, 349H;[24] and MACS, WJ-251[25] and the X-1131; and Apollo, 394H;[24] were also funded. These programs represented diverse frequencies and power levels and two focusing schemes--field reversal and periodic permanent magnet (PPM) focusing. Straight-field permanent-magnet (PM) focusing has been displaced by the lighter one- or two-field reversal permanent-magnet approach,[23] and bifilar helix electrostatic focusing has been eliminated[26] by PPM focusing. The power levels of the space tubes range from 2 to 35 watts of saturated power, although TWTs at the 100- to 1000-watt cw level for airborne and ground use are readily available from 1 to 10 kMc.

The heater requirements of some of these tubes are shown in Fig. 8.* The higher heater powers sometimes correspond to larger cathodes. This is necessary if longer life is required, since the emission density must be lowered. A larger cathode and a higher convergence (cathode area to beam area) gun is then designed. The data of Fig. 8, according to manufacturers' predictions, correspond to a 30,000 hr or more life. The dashed line represents the lower bound set by present technology. Some of the tubes above this bound are designed for 80,000 hr life (end of life is set by oxide depletion),[24] inadequate diffusion rate of the reducing agent,[24] or by

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*The reader is cautioned not to draw conclusions regarding the relative merits of the various manufacturers' tubes inasmuch as these data are not based on the same criteria. Some data represent objectives, some best values on a single tube, others are guaranteed minimum values, while still others are average values based on a significant number of tubes. In addition, some results are measurements on prototypes rather than production models.

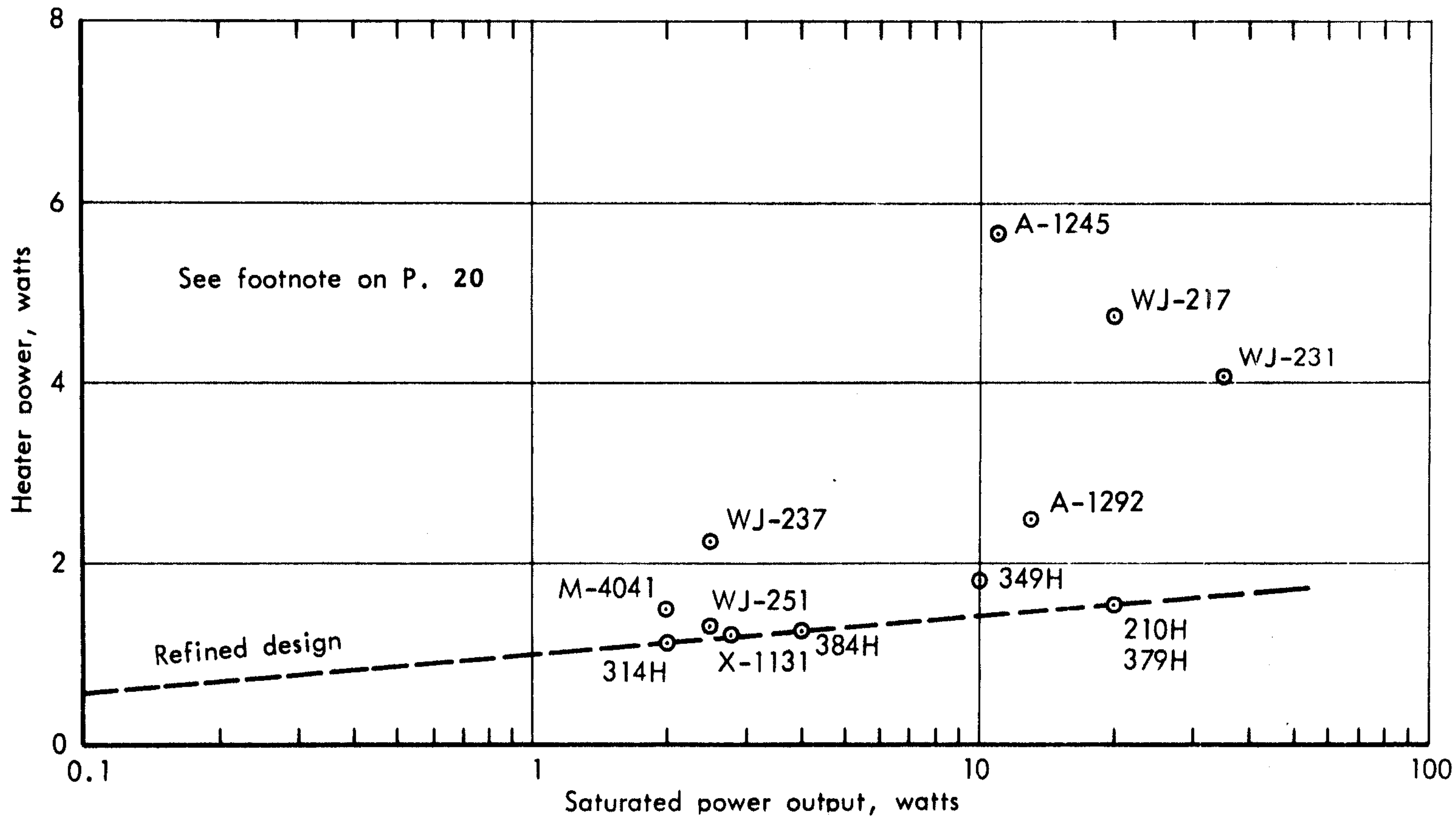

Fig. 8—Space traveling wave tube heater power

inadequate chemical reaction rate of the coating[23].) Further test data (beyond the roughly 20,000 hr accumulated to date on each of a dozen tubes) are required to substantiate the 25,000 to 90,000 hr life predictions in the case of the Hughes tubes because of their radical departure[24,34] from proven BTL technology.[23]

Beam efficiencies (RF out/DC input) of 30 per cent are now readily obtainable. Many of the factors degrading TWT efficiency[37] may prove amenable to improvements. If tapered slow-wave structures (velocity or phase taper), hollow beams or multiple depressed collectors (two or three instead of just one) are used, for example, it may be possible to obtain 40 per cent or better beam efficiency. Traveling wave tube efficiency, using such an optimized 40 per cent beam efficiency figure and the lower-bound heater power curve, is shown in Fig. 9.

In present TWTs used for space communication, so many parameters are involved in design tradeoffs that the dependence of beam efficiency on either frequency or output power is completely masked. Thus, a constant beam efficiency of 40 per cent has been assumed. Tubes often provide a higher power output at a particular frequency in the band, and selected tubes often provide appreciably more power output than the average.[34] Thus 50 per cent beam efficiency can probably be demonstrated at particular frequencies by selected tubes operated under optimum conditions. Overall efficiencies approaching 50 per cent including heater power would then be possible. At present the required tubes are selected from a larger group which have passed quality assurance tests. Optimization and selection may permit 45 per cent overall efficiency at the 10 to 20 watt level to be achieved

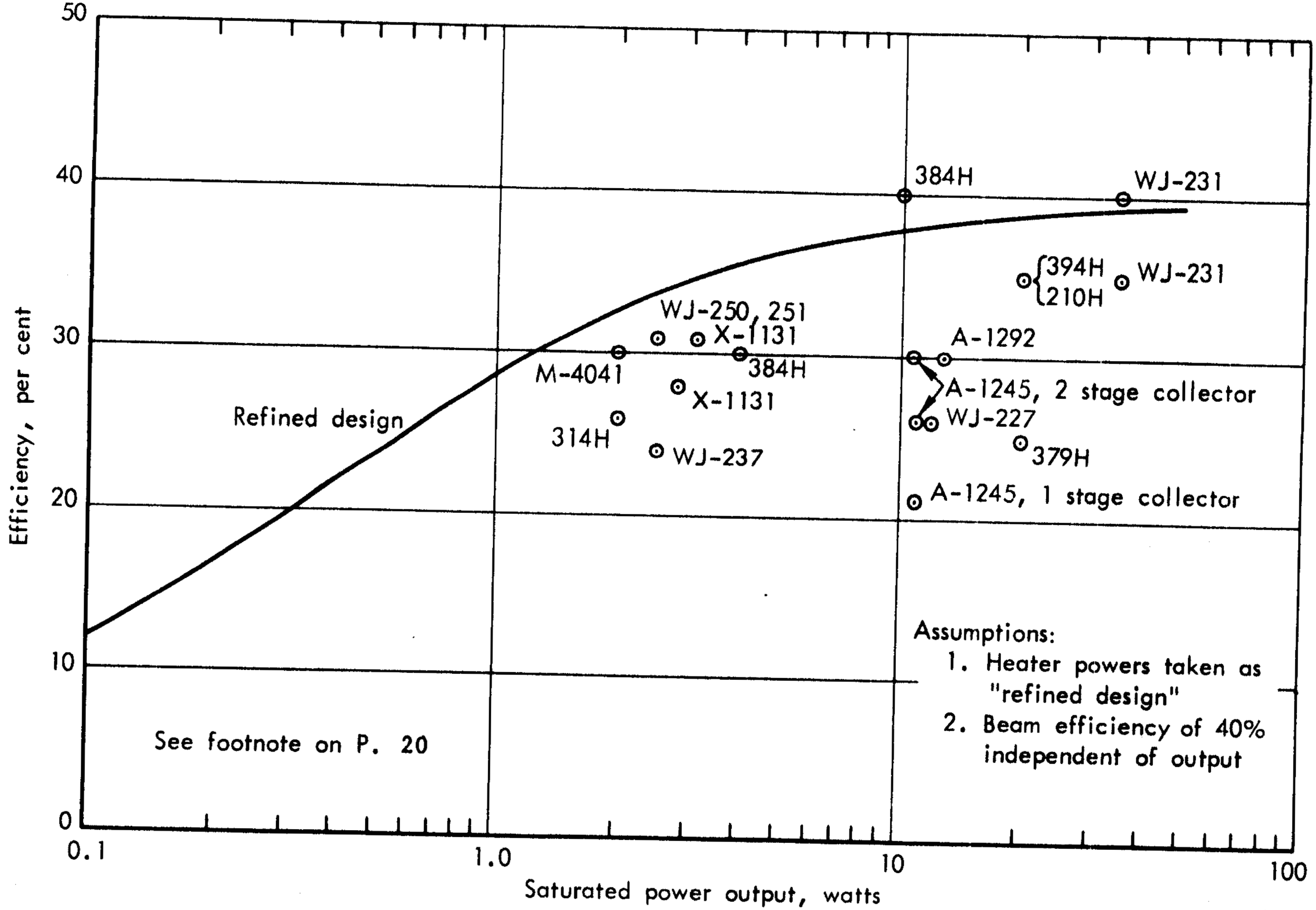

Fig. 9—Overall traveling wave tube efficiency including heater power

in delivered lots in 1964.[38] Combinations of the techniques previously mentioned plus a variety of other approaches may result in even higher efficiency. Several contracts have been funded recently to provide high efficiency in a 20-watt TWT transmitter package[38] and to explore the possibilities of large improvements in TWT efficiency.[39,40]

Comparison of Vacuum Tubes

So far in this section the present technology in microwave amplifiers for use in space has been examined briefly for negative grid tubes, for klystrons and for amplitrons, and in somewhat greater detail for TWTs. In choosing between these four vacuum-tube devices some of the factors most often considered are size,[41] weight,[41] reliability, resistance to charged particle radiation, resistance to shock and to vibration, temperature sensitivity, modulation, life, efficiency, power level, gain and frequency. As a result of the design choices made by tube designers having space requirements in mind, many of these factors no longer provide assistance in making a choice within the frequency range of 1 to 10 k Mc at intermediate power levels. Thus with a proper choice of materials, particle radiation need not be a problem for vacuum tubes at these power levels; none of the four tube types appears to be inherently unreliable on basic principles; with attention to mechanical design, shock and vibration environments can be tolerated even where the tubes must operate during launch; the space amplitron and the electrostatically focused klystron are certainly competitive in size and weight with the triode cavity amplifier and the TWT. Thus the significant differences which permit making a selection lie in the remaining factors. These, however, tend to be interrelated and their interactions must often be considered.

Modulation involves stability, linearity, bandwidth, etc. Temperature sensitivity and narrow bandwidth are common to both the triode cavity amplifier and the klystron, since both use high-Q tuned cavities. Integral cavity triodes[42] and stagger-tuned (approximately maximally flat) multicavity klystrons[43] providing 10 to 20 per cent bandwidth are feasible in high-power tubes, but at the few-watt level at high efficiency, 3 db bandwidths of .5 to 1 per cent for triodes and .1 to .3 per cent for klystrons are typical. For narrow-bandwidth applications, these devices may eliminate the need for output filtering. The space amplitron, however, has a constant-voltage bandwidth of 1 to 2 per cent; while for space TWTs, 10 to 50 per cent is typical. The need for cavity temperature compensation complicates the design and lowers the reliability of the triode circuit, but may do so to a far greater extent for the klystron. Shift of the klystron center frequency by a large fraction of the bandwidth due to temperature is generally not tolerable in such a very narrow-band device. Field-reversal PM-focused TWTs and PM space amplitrons can be relatively insensitive to temperature change. PPM-focused TWTs use the new magnetic material platinum-cobalt which has a sufficiently low temperature coefficient of magnetic field that it makes possible relatively temperature-insensitive operation.

The factors of life, efficiency, power level, gain, and frequency, are closely interrelated and must be treated as a group. For the present, both the ESF klystron and amplitron cannot be considered for communication satellites because they have not yet demonstrated adequate life on even a few samples. Advantages to the klystron may lie in such areas as frequency and phase stability, linearity, variable-power level of operation, noise figure and efficiency.[20] Under efficient operation, klystron output power level can be varied by changing fewer power-supply voltages than on the TWT. Where efficient operation over a wide power range is essential, the simpler klystron power supply can represent an advantage. At high power levels, where efficiency is particularly important, the space klystron may perform better than the TWT--given a comparable investment in resources. In communications systems, however, the requirement for higher power is often a consequence of the demand for higher information rates. Thus, high power levels are associated with large bandwidths. In view of the narrow bandwidth and temperature sensitivity of the klystron, its value in communication satellites can be expected to be limited.

For communication satellite use the amplitron would have to demonstrate a life in excess of 30,000 hr to be suitable. For space missions, 10,000 hr might suffice. The amplitron not only requires a more complex power supply than the TWT, it places a number of constraints on the input signals, and has significantly lower gain, and so it must provide a significant efficiency improvement over the TWT to be worth consideration. Part of its efficiency is offset by the cost in power and complexity of generating the higher drive signal. At the 20-watt level, a 50 per cent efficient amplitron appears necessary to compete with a 45 per cent efficient TWT purely on an efficiency basis. At power levels above 100 watts, efficiency becomes increasingly important in space because of the twin problems of energy generation and of the radiation of waste heat.

At the 500-watt level, a 55 per cent efficient amplitron might offer a substantial advantage over a 45 per cent efficient TWT, but these characteristics are meaningless in the absence of life data.

If the amplitron proves to have short life, this would not eliminate crossed-field devices from further consideration for long-life space applications--it may only eliminate the continuous or distributed emission cathode. Crossed-field forward-wave amplifiers[44] using injected beams would circumvent this problem while offering many of the advantages of the TWT. Such a space tube is considered feasible by research workers at CSF.

At power levels of 1 watt or more, triodes cannot compete with TWTs on an efficiency basis when lifetimes of 30,000 hr or more and frequencies above 1000 Mc are considered. At 500 Mc and below, the situation may reverse--but this is also the domain in which triodes must compete with solid-state devices. Requirements for shorter life, lower frequencies, lower power levels, and lower bandwidth tend to enhance the potential efficiency of the triode. The low-gain-per-triode stage above 1000 Mc and the high heater power per tube strongly penalize triodes in an overall efficiency comparison with the TWT. The extensive use of the triode is a reflection of its low cost and ready availability, of the widespread understanding among electronic engineers of the techniques for coaxial-cavity amplifier design, and of the ubiquitous preference for in-house fabrication of hardware.[30]

Satellite TWT Voltage Converters

Solid-state microwave output devices can be operated directly off a low-voltage regulated supply. In communication satellites, they are the major load on the supply so that it is reasonable to optimize the energy source output voltage for this load. Vacuum tube devices, on the other hand, require a DC-to-DC high-voltage converter to supply the correct voltages. Thus the inefficiency of a voltage converter must be charged against the TWT but not against the solid-state supply. For the comparisons of this study, regulator performance will be ignored because regulators are present in both systems, and therefore will not have a significant influence on the comparisons.

Voltage converters are less efficient at low power levels because of fixed power requirements. At the higher power levels there is little room for improvement. The lower curve of Fig. 10 shows typical satellite TWT converter efficiency, and the upper one shows about the best that has been achieved to date. The four points shown are based on the performance of a unit, the X-1132,[45] built by the Engineered Magnetics Division of Gulton Industries[46] for Eimac.

For optimum overall efficiency, the voltage converter must be designed to be used with a particular TWT. Thus the converter must be changed when the tube is changed. The same is true for the amplitron, but not for the triode and klystron. Since the varactor multiplier does not require voltage conversion while the TWT does, a combined efficiency for the TWT has been calculated using the curves of Figs. 8 and 10. The curve of Fig. 11 is calculated using the "refined design" curve of Fig. 8, the assumption of a 40 per cent beam efficiency independent of output power and the "best" voltage

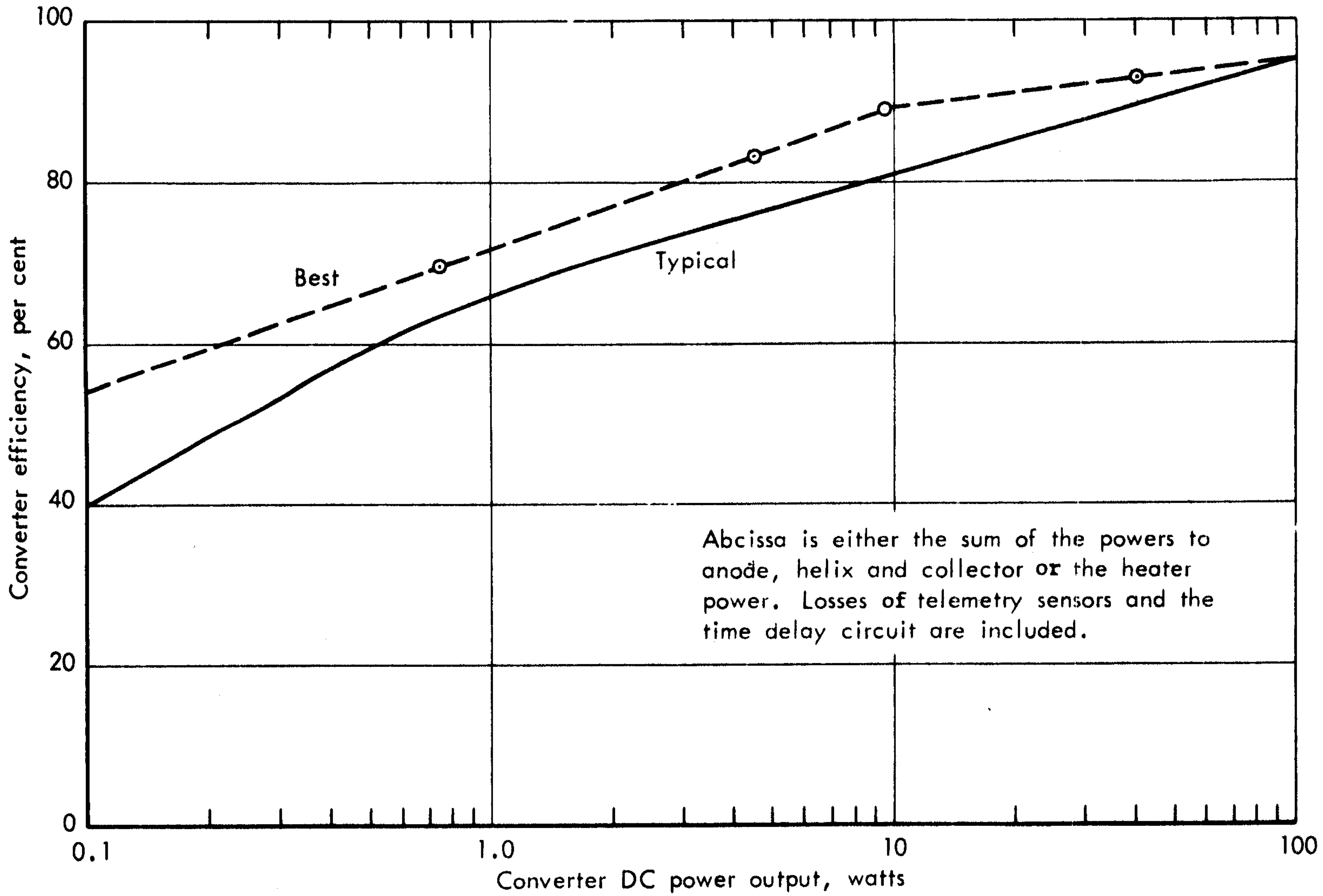

Fig. 10—Satellite TWT DC to DC voltage conversion efficiency excluding regulator

conversion efficiency curve. The latter curve is used twice, once for the regulated power required for the heater and once for the beam power.

In summary, the TWT has no immediate competitor in the vacuum tube field above 1 kMc, for power levels of 1 watt or more and lifetimes in excess of 30,000 hr. Therefore the primary contenders in the near future for power generation for communication satellites at 4 kMc are varactor multiplier chains and TWTs.

IV. COMPARISON OF VARACTOR MULTIPLIERS AND TWTS

Using the TWT plus voltage converter combined efficiency curve of Fig. 11 as a function of output power level, and the varactor multiplier chain efficiency curves of Fig. 6 as a function of output power level, the locus of equal efficiencies has been plotted in Fig. 12. Thus near-term future performance of the solid state multipliers is compared with TWT developments in the same time period. The lighter weight of the solid state approach at the low power levels tends to favor solid state even more than is indicated by the efficiency comparison alone; the power limitations of present varactors do not affect the results within the limited power range of Fig. 12. At the higher frequencies and power levels the TWT has a decided advantage. At lower frequencies and powers the solid state approach has an advantage. Thus, for frequency-stable local oscillators and for low-level drivers, the solid-state approach is preferred. In general, as the ambient increases from $+20^\circ C$ to $+80^\circ C$, the solid-state efficiency falls off about 25 per cent.* Under these conditions the

*See Ref. 14 for an exception.

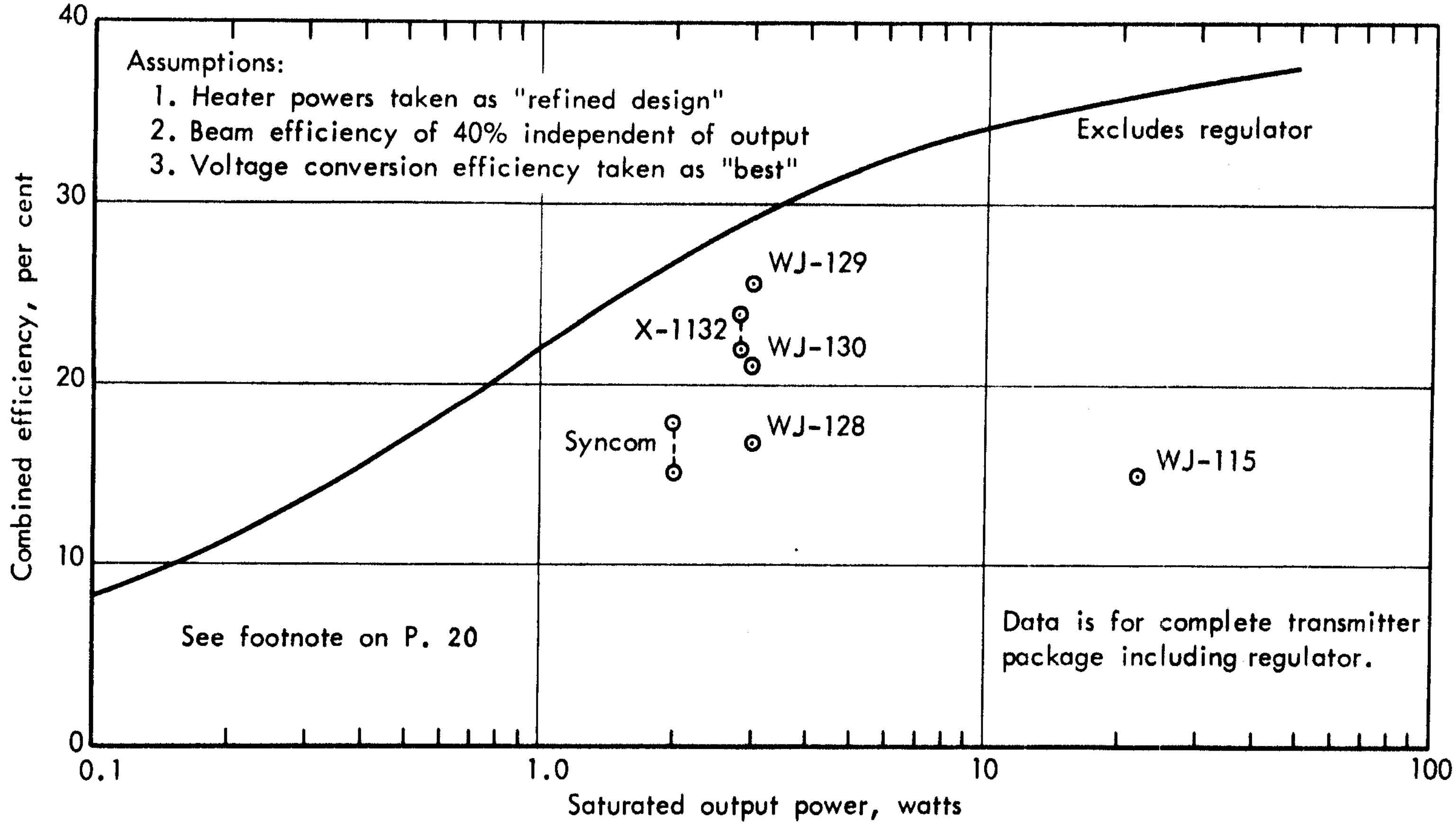

Fig. 11—Efficiency of traveling wave tube plus voltage converter

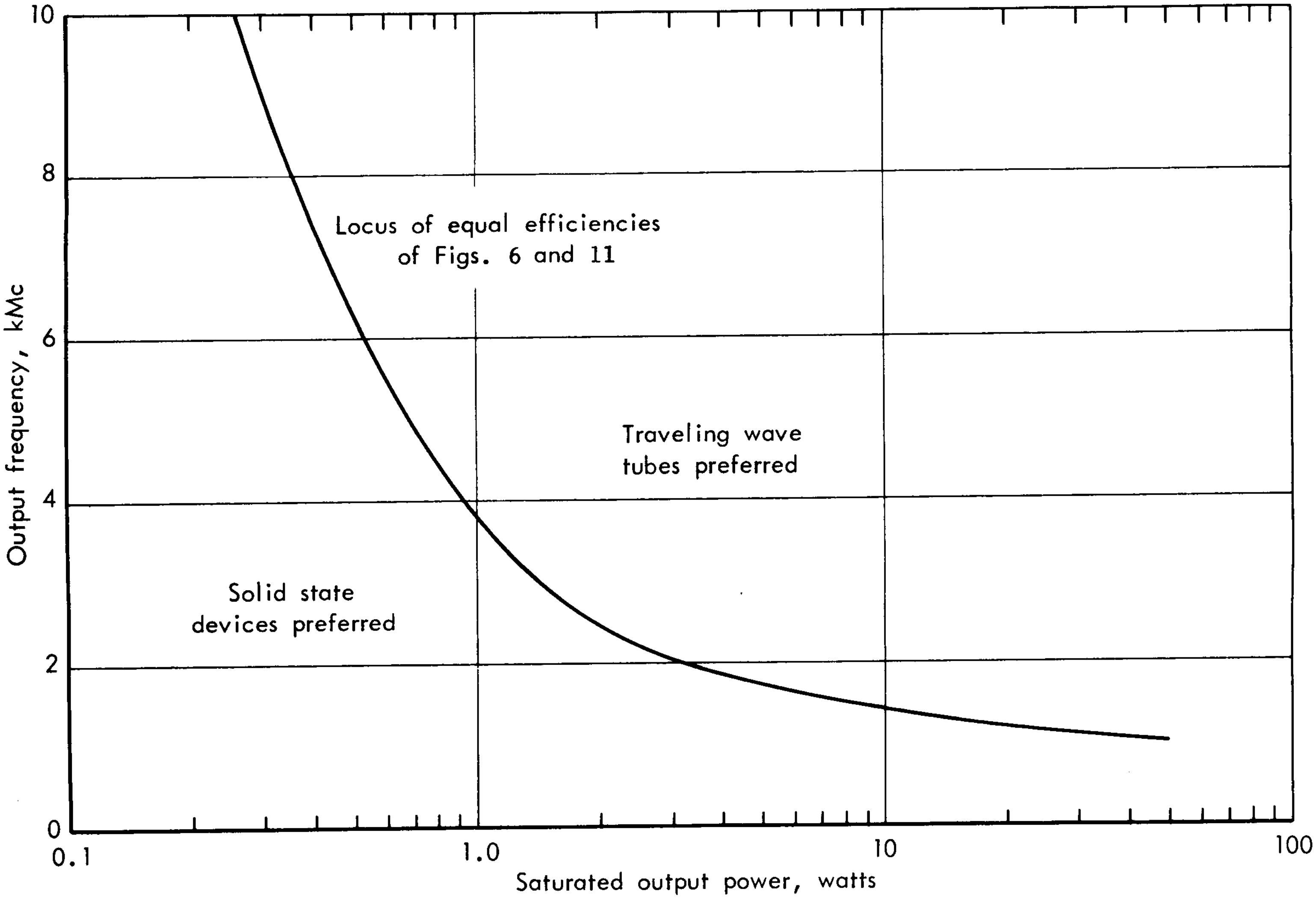

Fig. 12—Solid state devices compared to traveling wave tubes; near-term future technology; +20°C environment

crossover with TWTs, whose efficiencies are relatively insensitive to temperature, is moved radially inward as shown in Fig. 13. (There is, however, a small change in converter output voltage with temperature which causes a slight decrease in efficiency.) Solid-state chains offer the in-house design convenience of the triode without the delay and expense of a TWT optimization program.

It appears that for lifetimes in excess of 30,000 hr, and for frequencies above 1000 Mc, TWTs and solid-state devices have no competitors of comparable efficiency at present. The engineering choice between solid-state devices and TWTs is made primarily on the basis of frequency and power level, but is strongly influenced by temperature and bandwidth considerations. For other space applications than communication satellites the relative importance of some of the factors may be greatly altered or new constraints may be introduced, e.g., no stray magnetic field. Only after a detailed specification of requirements has been made can a single one of the devices discussed be selected as optimum for a particular application; no one vacuum tube or semiconductor device is the answer to every system.

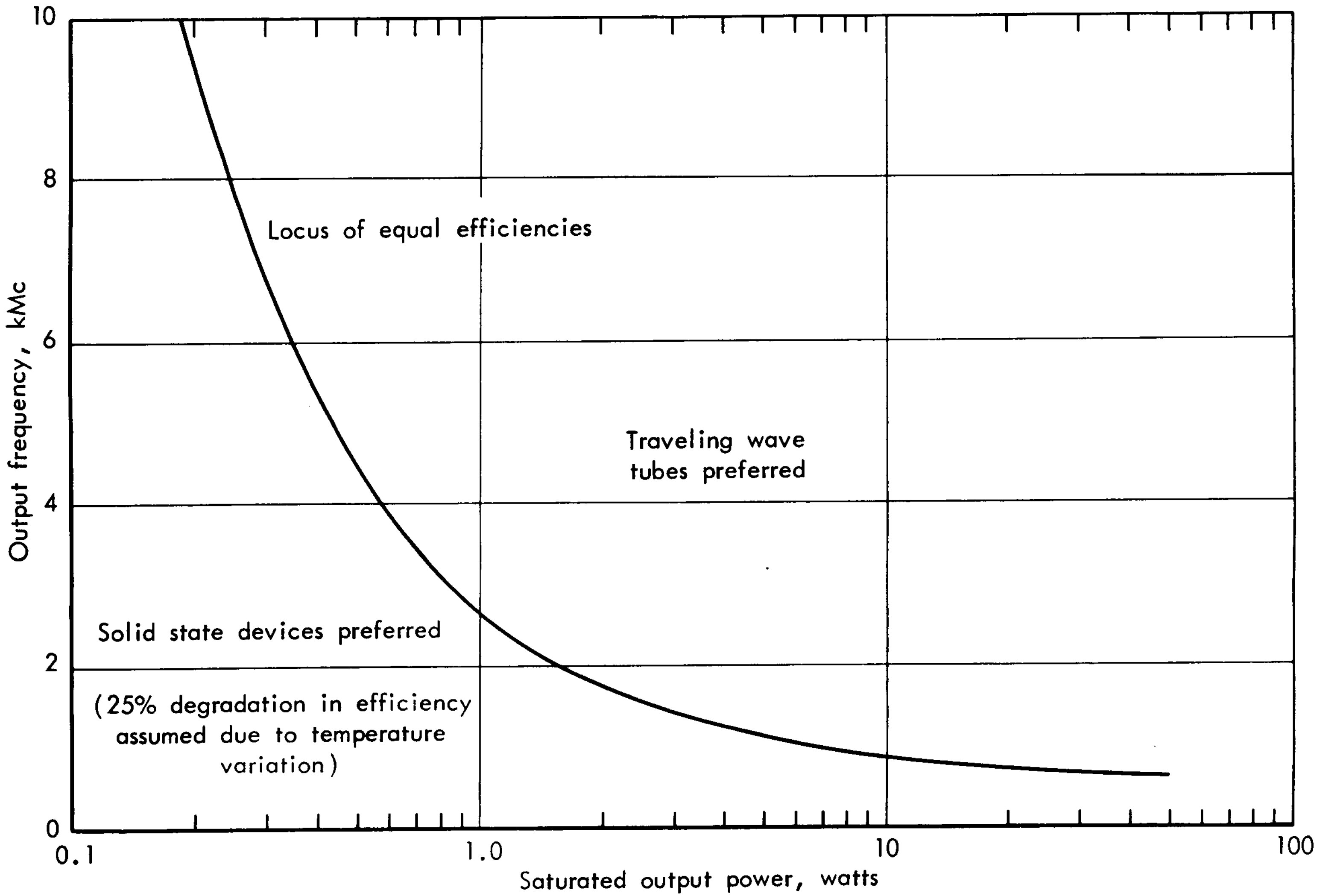

Fig. 13—Solid state devices compared to traveling wave tubes; near-term future technology; +20°C to +80°C environment

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